

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A method of controlling a telephone call to an instant messaging user, comprising the steps of:

(a) receiving at a call server a call directed to the user;

(b) identifying an instant messaging service used by the user;

(c) sending an instant message to the user through the instant messaging service to offer the user one or more options for responding to the call, wherein said options are based on a profile of the user;

(d) if no response is received from the user within a predetermined period of time, controlling the call as specified in a default option; and

otherwise:

(e) receiving an option selection from the user over the instant messaging service; and

(f) controlling the call as specified in said selected option;

wherein when the user selects an option to answer the call over the instant messaging service, the controlling step further comprises the steps of:

(f1) if the instant messaging service is communicatively coupled to both a microphone and a speaker at the user's side, establishing an audio connection between the user and the caller; and

(f2) if the instant messaging service is not communicatively coupled to a speaker at the user's side, establishing verbal-textual communication between the caller and the user by enabling speech-to-text software conversion; and

(f3) if the instant messaging service is not communicatively coupled to both a microphone and a speaker at the user's side, establishing verbal-textual communication between the caller and the user by enabling speech-to-text and/or text-to-speech software conversion modules.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising determining a user name of the user for the instant messaging service.
3. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said one or more options include one or more of the set of: transfer the call, answer the call, take a message from the caller and play a message for the caller.
4. (Cancelled)
5. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said selected option is presented in said instant message as a hyperlink and said receiving said option selection comprises receiving a communication connection initiated by the user's selection of said selected option.
6. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said selected option is to play a message for the caller, the method further comprising recording a message from the user.
7. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said selected option is to play a message for the caller and said controlling comprises:
converting a textual message provided by the user into audio; and
playing said converted message for the caller.
8. (Previously Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the step (f1) further comprises the steps of:

establishing an audio connection between the user and said call server;
and

bridging the call onto said audio connection.

9. (Previously Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein said audio connection between the user and the caller is established through the instant messaging service without further action by either the caller or the user.

10. (Cancelled)

11. (Currently Amended) A method of handling a telephone call for a subscriber, comprising the steps of:

(a) receiving at a call server a call for a subscriber;

(b) identifying a first computer-implemented instant messaging system used by the subscriber;

(c) sending a first instant message to the subscriber through the instant messaging system, wherein said first instant message includes a first set of options for handling the call, wherein said first set of options are based on a subscriber profile of the subscriber, and one or more of said first set of call handling options comprise links to said call server;

if the subscriber selects one of said first set of call handling options:

(d) receiving a communication connection from the subscriber, wherein said connection is initiated by the subscriber's selection of a call handling option that comprises a link; and

(e) handling the call as specified in said selected call handling option;

wherein when the subscriber selects an option to answer the call over the instant messaging service, the controlling step further comprises the steps of:

(e1) if the instant messaging service is communicatively coupled to both a microphone and a speaker at the subscriber's side, establishing an audio connection between the subscriber and the caller; and

(e2) if the instant messaging service is not communicatively coupled to both a microphone and a speaker at the subscriber's side, establishing verbal-textual communication between the caller and the subscriber by enabling speech-to-text and/or text-to-speech software conversion modules.

12. (Original) The method of claim 11, further comprising:

if the subscriber does not respond to said first instant message within a predetermined period of time, handling the call as specified in a default call handling option.

13. (Original) The method of claim 11, further comprising:

identifying the user by an original called number field of the call.

14. (Original) The method of claim 11, further comprising:

identifying the caller by a caller identification field of the call;

wherein said first instant message includes an identifier of the caller.

15. (Original) The method of claim 11, wherein said links are hyperlinks to said call server.

16. (Original) The method of claim 11, wherein said receiving a call comprises receiving a call forwarded to said call server from a subscriber number originally dialed by the caller.

17. (Original) The method of claim 11, further comprising retrieving user names of the subscriber for one or more instant messaging systems.

18. (Original) The method of claim 11, further comprising sending a second instant message to the subscriber through an instant messaging system different from said first instant messaging system, wherein said second instant message comprises a second set of call handling options.

19. (Original) The method of claim 18, further comprising:

if the subscriber selects one of said second set of call handling options:

receiving a return instant message from the subscriber, wherein said return instant message includes an identifier of a call handling option selected by the subscriber; and

handling the call as specified in said selected call handling option.

20. (Original) The method of claim 11, wherein said selected call handling option comprises transferring the call and said handling the call comprises:

transferring the call from said call server to a telephone number identified by the subscriber.

21. (Original) The method of claim 11, wherein said selected call handling option comprises playing a message for the caller and said handling the call comprises:

playing a message identified by the subscriber for the caller.

22. (Original) The method of claim 21, further comprising converting said identified message from text to audio prior to said playing.

23. (Original) The method of claim 21, further comprising recording said message prior to said playing.

24. (Previously Amended) The method of claim 11, wherein step (e1) further comprises the steps of:

establishing an audio connection between said call server and the subscriber, without further action on the part of the caller; and

bridging the call onto said audio connection.

25. (Cancelled)

26. (Original) The method of claim 24, wherein said establishing an audio connection comprises establishing an audio connection between said call server and a communication device on which the subscriber received said first instant message.

27. (Original) The method of claim 11, wherein said selected call handling option comprises taking a voicemail message from the caller and said handling the call comprises:

connecting the call to a voice recording module; and

recording a message from the caller.

28. (Original) The method of claim 27, wherein the subscriber chooses to screen said voicemail message, the method further comprising

establishing an audio connection between said call server and the subscriber; and

bridging said audio connection onto said voice recording connection.

29. (Currently Amended) A computer readable storage medium storing instructions that, when executed by a computer, cause the computer to perform a method of controlling a telephone call to an instant messaging user, the method comprising the steps of:

(a) receiving at a call server a call directed to the user;

(b) identifying an instant messaging service used by the user;

(c) sending an instant message to the user through the instant messaging service to offer the user one or more options for responding to the call, wherein said options are based on a profile of the user;

(d) if no response is received from the user within a predetermined period of time, controlling the call as specified in a default option; and

otherwise:

(e) receiving an option selection from the user; and

(f) controlling the call as specified in said selected option;

wherein when the user selects an option to answer the call over the instant messaging service, the controlling step further comprises the steps of:

(f1) if the instant messaging service is communicatively coupled to both a microphone and a speaker at the user's side, establishing an audio connection between the user and the caller; and

(f2) if the instant messaging service is not communicatively coupled to both a microphone and a speaker at the user's side, establishing verbal-textual communication between the caller and the user by enabling speech-to-text and/or text-to-speech software conversion modules.

30. (Currently Amended) A call control system for handling calls in real-time, comprising:

a call receiver module configured to receive a call directed to a subscriber;

a database of subscriber profiles, wherein a profile for a first subscriber includes one or more user names of the first subscriber for one or more instant messaging systems;

an instant messaging module configured to send an initial instant messaging message to the first subscriber in response to receipt of a call for the first subscriber from a caller, wherein said initial instant messaging message includes a set of options for handling the call based on the subscriber profile stored in the database of subscriber profiles;

a voicemail module configured to record an incoming message from the caller if the first subscriber selects a voicemail option for handling the call;

a message playback module configured to play an outgoing message for the caller if the first subscriber selects a message playback option for handling the call;

an audio module configured to establish an audio connection with the first subscriber if the first subscriber selects a call handling option for answering the call over said one or more instant messaging systems, said audio module being further configured to establish an audio connection with the first subscriber if the first subscriber selects a voicemail with screening option for handling the call; and

software for at least one text-to-speech and speech-to-text conversion modules—which, along with other components of the system, enable verbal-textual communication between the first subscriber and the caller over the instant messaging system being used by the first subscriber.

31. (Original) The call control system of claim 30, wherein one or more of said call handling options in said initial instant messaging message comprise hyperlinks to the call control system.

32. (Original) The call control system of claim 31, further comprising a network server configured to receive a communication connection from the first subscriber initiated by the first subscriber's selection of one of said hyperlink call handling options.

33. (Original) The call control system of claim 30, wherein said instant messaging module is further configured to receive a return instant messaging message from the first subscriber, wherein said return instant messaging message includes a selection of one of said call handling options.

34. (Cancelled)

35. (Cancelled)

36. (Cancelled)